

Partner Debo Adegbile Helps Nextdoor Curb Racial Profiling on Neighborhood Networks

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When [Nextdoor](#), a private social network for neighborhoods, realized that some members were engaging in racial profiling when reporting “suspicious” people and activities in their communities, the company was determined to respond.

As part of their response, Nextdoor consulted with local community groups, several implicit bias experts, city partners like Oakland, and WilmerHale Partner [Debo Adegbile](#). As one of the nation's top civil rights lawyers and a former leader of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., Adegbile was especially well suited to assist Nextdoor in confronting this issue. A partner in WilmerHale's [Government and Regulatory Litigation Group](#) with a varied litigation and counseling practice, Adegbile is a key member of the firm's team working nationally on police reform and advising departments on how to adopt best practices and improve police-community relations by revamping policies and training, among other measures.

While Adegbile was uniquely qualified to assist Nextdoor in tackling the problem, the neighbor-based social network presented a unique challenge in its own right. Although considerable research exists on the problem of racial profiling by law enforcement, person-on-person or neighbor-on-neighbor profiling doesn't have a widely accepted definition.

Rising to the challenge, Nextdoor rolled out a series of product improvements they hoped would curb these types of posts by their members. Among the enhancements made, Nextdoor created a new flow that guides members when posting in the Crime & Safety section, preventing them from posting unless they add specific information on actual suspicious behaviors and individuals, not just the race and gender of the people they observe in the neighborhood.

“Racial profiling affects communities across the nation,” Adegbile said. “Nextdoor faced a problem that threatened its core mission of bringing neighbors together and strengthening communities. Nirav Tolia (Nextdoor's Co-Founder and CEO), Sarah Leary (Co-Founder and VP of Marketing and Operations) and the leadership team at Nextdoor did not shy away from the challenge; rather they embraced it—they listened, gained a deeper understanding of the dimension of the problem, and

engaged collaboratively in a process designed to find a testable solution.”

Through its pioneering and collaborative effort to end the profiling on its site, Nextdoor has eliminated 75% of offending posts on its platform in recent tests. *Fortune* and *Fusion* recently published stories on Nextdoor’s response.

“Racial profiling poses a real challenge in America. Nextdoor decided that it was going be the tech company to confront the problem head-on—and it has with encouraging early results,” said Adegbile. “Though Nextdoor knows that there is more to do, they deserve credit for their leadership and pioneering steps to ensure that social networks are truly inclusive. For community-based companies, it’s both good business and good policy to find ways to be civil, effective and safe.”